



Southeast (HHS Region 4)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

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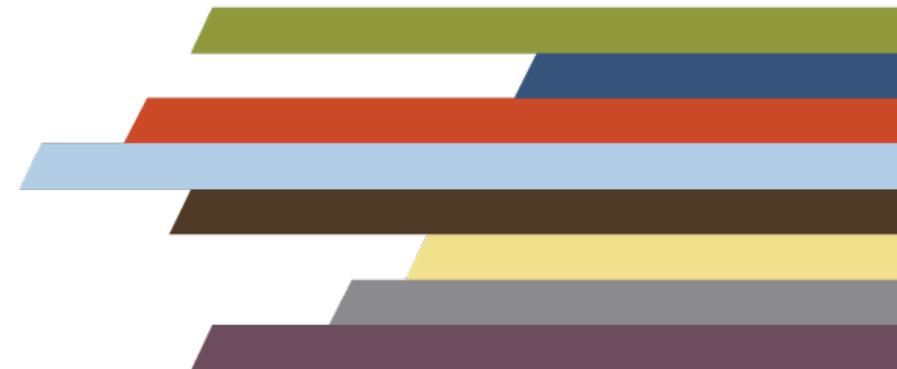
# Supporting Autistic Students in the Classroom with Anxiety and other Mental Health Challenges: Your Questions Answered

Katherine Pickard, PhD

Emory University School of Medicine

September 28, 2022

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**The Southeast MHTTC** is located at Emory University in the Rollins School of Public Health.

**Our Mission:** To promote the implementation and sustainability of evidence-based mental health services in the Southeastern United States.

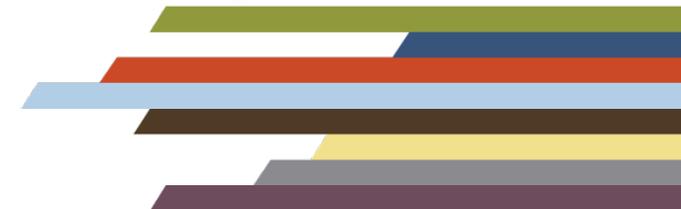
**Our Vision:** Widespread access to evidence-based mental health services for those in need.

**Our Services:** We use a public health approach to build leadership capacity and to provide mental health trainings and resources to providers, agencies, and communities across the Southeast.



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# Katherine Pickard, PhD

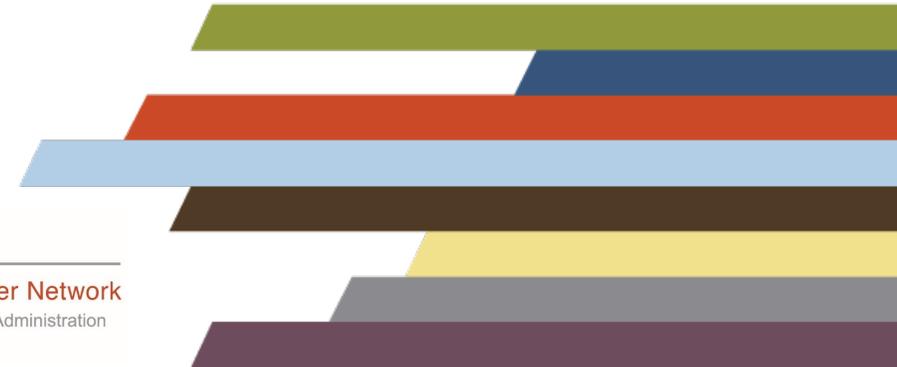
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## Assistant Professor

Emory University, Department of Pediatrics, Division of Autism and Related Disabilities

## Research and Clinical Interests

- Translating best practice interventions for autism into community settings.
- Extensive work within early intervention and public school systems.



# A Note on Identity First Language Use

Within our products on autism, we use *identity first* language.

We have made this decision:

- In response to the neurodiversity movement.
- Based on the preference of many autistic adults.
- In order to avoid the use ableist language.

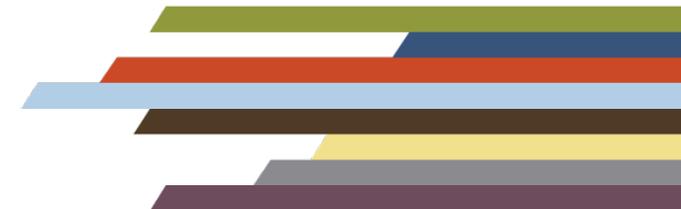
However, we recognize that this is not the preference of every individual or family and that many people continue to use person-first language.

(Bottema-Beutel et al., 2021)



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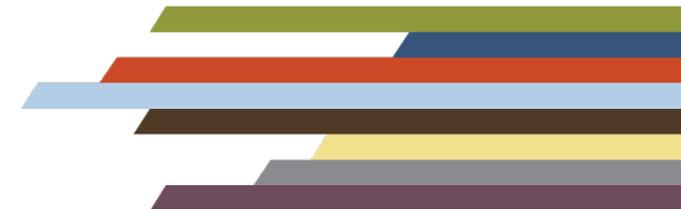


# Learning Session Objectives

The first learning session is devoted to identifying anxiety and other mental health challenges in autistic students.

By the end of the learning sessions, participants will be able to:

1. Identify anxiety and signs of other mental health challenges in autistic students.
2. Describe risk factors for autistic students to develop anxiety and other mental health challenges.
3. Identify anxiety signs within one case example of an autistic student.



# Polling Questions

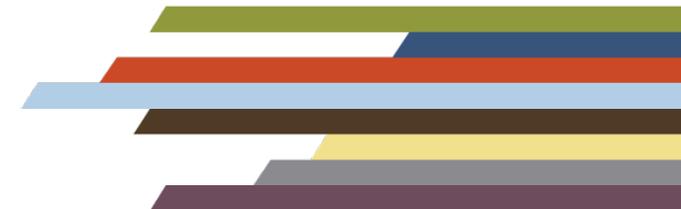
1. What is your professional role?
2. How much of your professional time do you spend working with autistic students?
3. How much of your professional time do you spend supporting the behavior and/or mental health of autistic students?

# Prevalence of Mental Health Challenges in Autistic Individuals

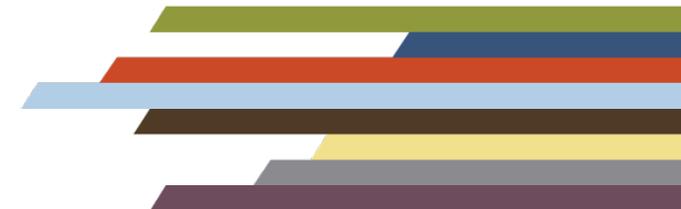
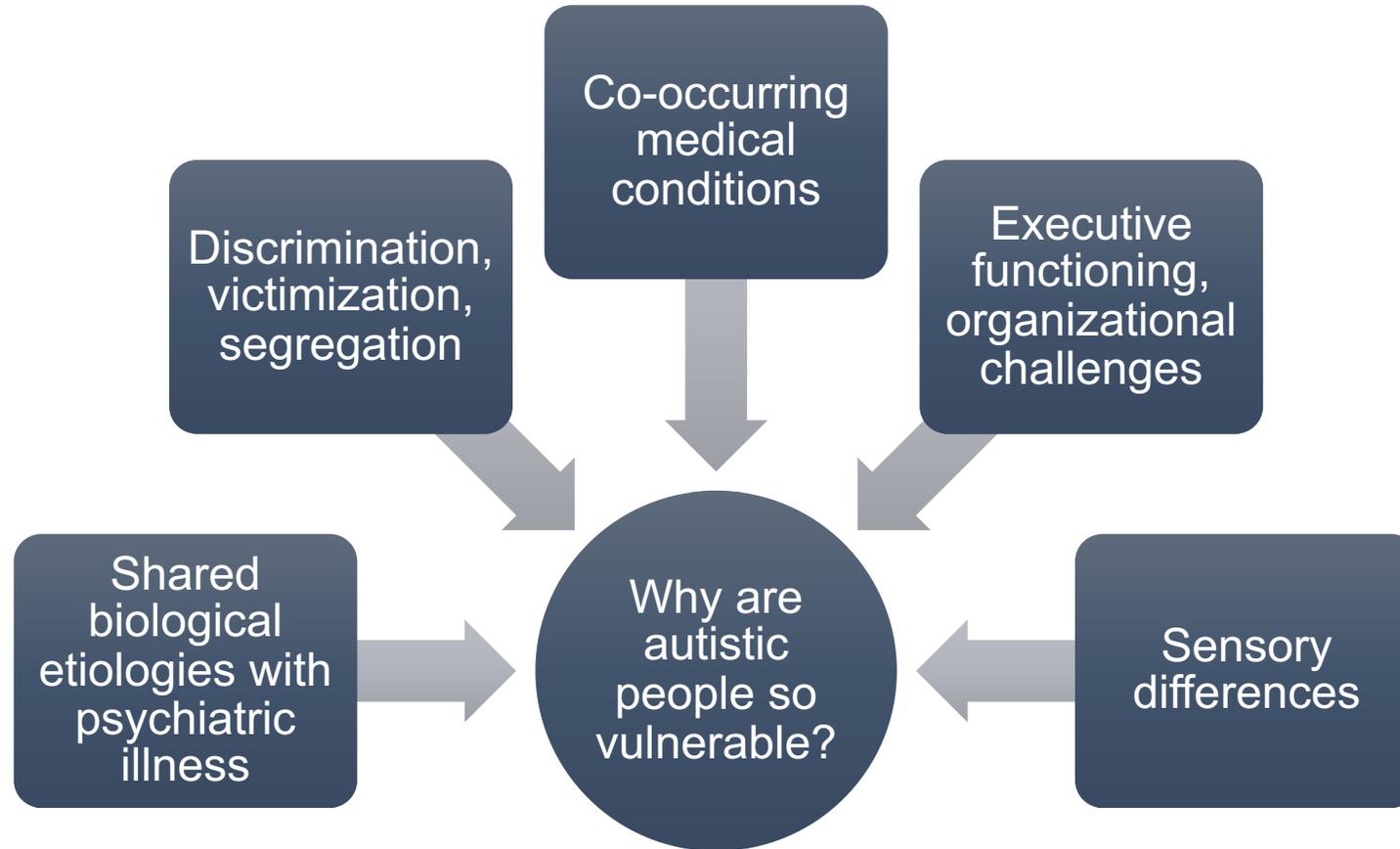
Mental Health Category	ASD	General Population
ADHD	28%	7.2%
Anxiety	20%	7.3%
Depression	11%	4.7%
Bipolar Disorders	5%	0.7%
Schizophrenia	4%	0.4%

**PRE-COVID!**

(Ghandour et al., 2019; Lai et al., 2019)



# Increased Vulnerability to Anxiety and Mental Health Challenges



# Challenges Identifying Anxiety

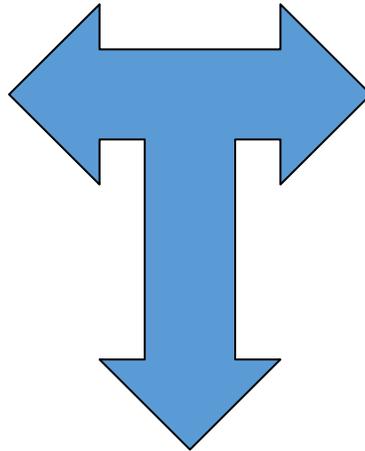
- Problem Behaviors: Aggression, self-injury, or other difficult behaviors are seen “naughty” behavior rather than mental health challenges.
- Diagnostic Overshadowing: Symptoms of anxiety and other mental health challenges are seen as being part of autism.
- Diagnostic Overlap: Shutting down or not talking to peers is a symptom of autism and also a symptom of social anxiety.
- Psychosocial Masking: Students may be able to “hide” their anxiety or mental health challenges at school due not wanting to appear different.
- Symptoms Present Differently: In autistic youth, anxiety may also look like an increase in autism symptoms, such as repetitive behaviors.



# Common Anxiety Symptoms in the General Population

## Physiological:

- Arousal; rapid heart rate
- Shaking/restlessness
- Anxious facial expression
- Crying/screaming
- Sleep/eating disturbance

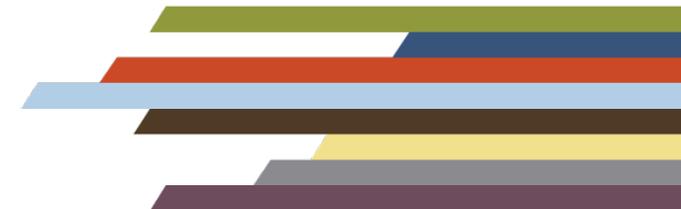


## Cognitive:

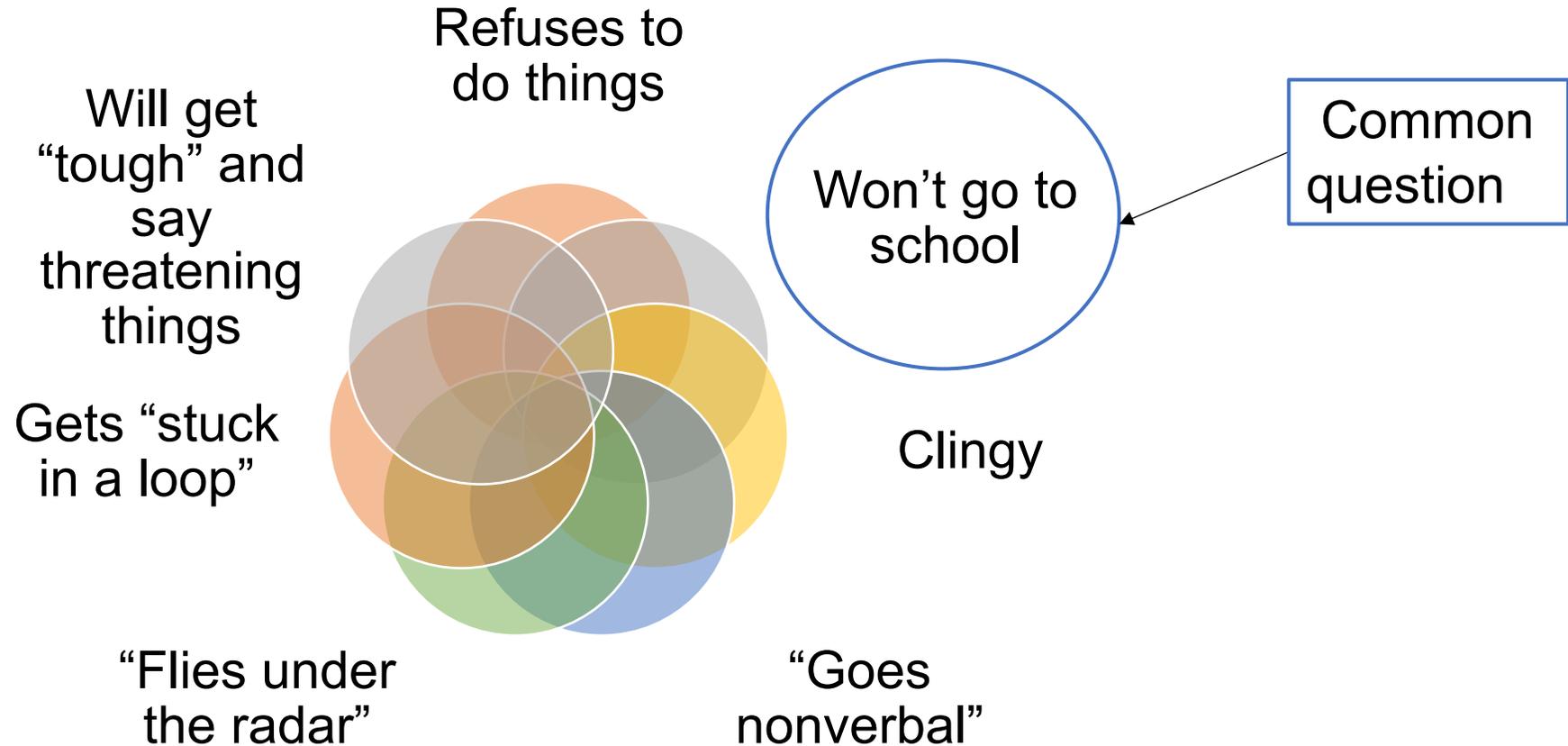
- Cognitive distortions
- Negative self talk
- Rumination
- Worry
- Anticipation of negative events

## Behavioral:

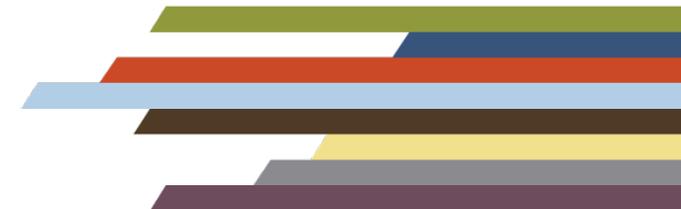
- Avoidance/withdrawal
- Reassurance seeking



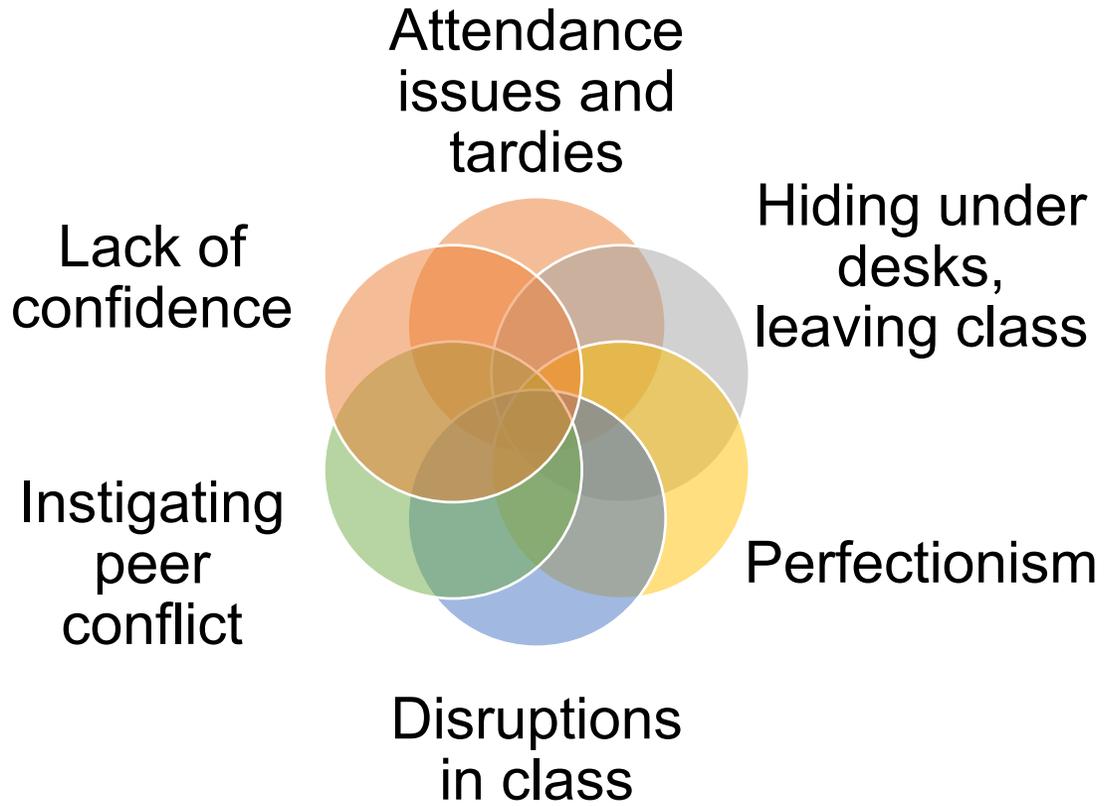
# Anxiety Symptoms Reported by Parents of Autistic Students



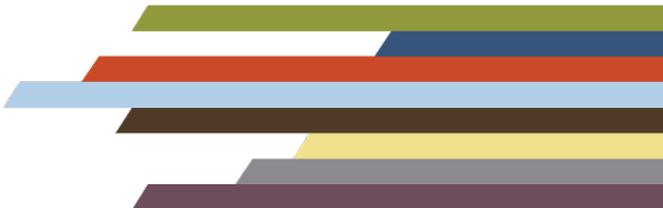
(Reaven et al., 2020)



# Anxiety Symptoms Reported by School Providers Serving Autistic Youth

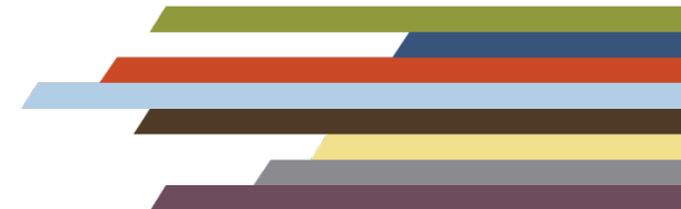


(Reaven et al., 2020)



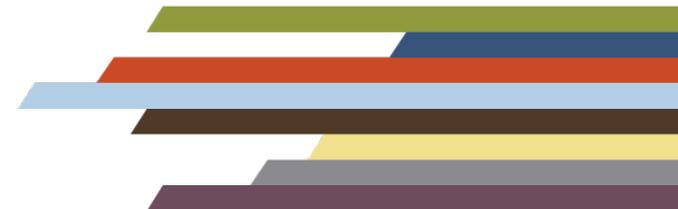
# Case Study

Darnell is in the fifth grade. He received a diagnosis of autism when he was three and received an IEP at that time. His social skills have improved significantly, however, he still qualified for an IEP under the identification of ASD. He has one friend who shares his interest in cars and videogames (e.g., Minecraft). Darnell participates in General Education. He does well, but he does not like group work, and is quick to correct others if they don't follow the rules of the project. Peers are starting to make fun of him and call him the "rules police." When there is a group project, he is now saying "I don't want to do it" or goes to the nurse with complaints of a stomachache. This is happening daily. He has a huge problem at PE and recess; he has shared that he hates losing, not getting picked for a team, or having people watch him do a sport that he's not good at. He is protesting going to both activities and asks to go to the library instead to read about cars. His school team is wondering if anxiety is at play and if treatment is needed.



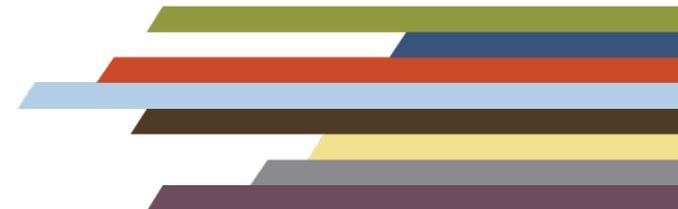
# Question 1

What specific behaviors make you think that this student may be experiencing anxiety?



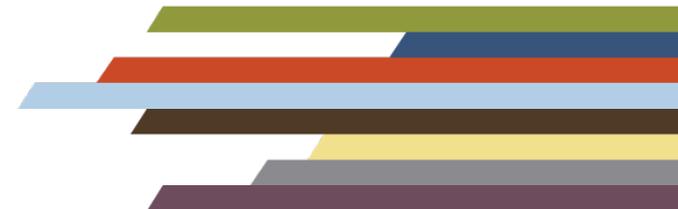
# Question 2

What makes you think that this student is experiencing anxiety and not just demonstrating challenging behavior?



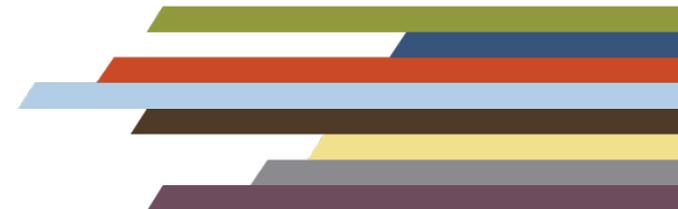
# Question 3

What other information would you want or need about this student to feel confident that they are experiencing anxiety?



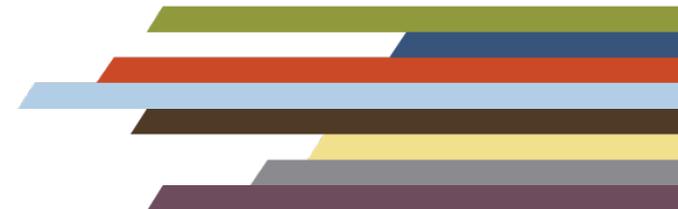
# Question 4

This student uses spoken communication, which may make it easier to identify anxiety. What behaviors might you pay attention to for students who do not use spoken communication or who also have an intellectual disability?



# Question 5

If you suspect this student has anxiety, what are your next steps to confirm anxiety and support this student?

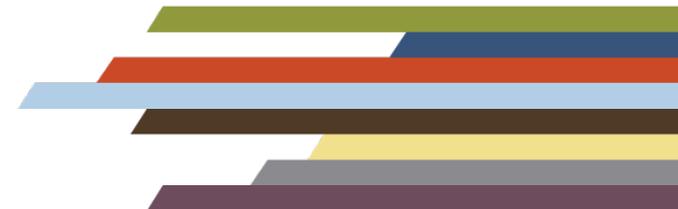


# Questions & Answers



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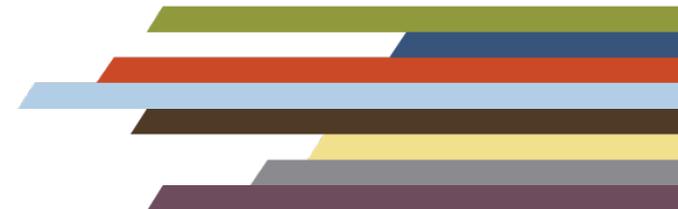
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# Next Time ... Learning Session 2

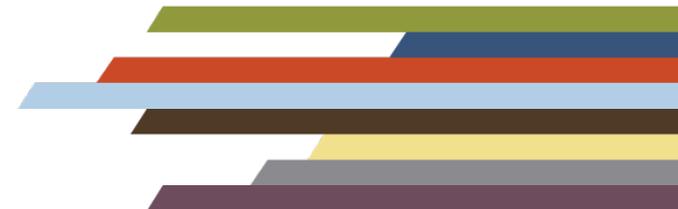
## Objectives

1. Describe evidence-based approaches to support anxiety in autistic students.
2. Understand different ways that mental health programming can be delivered to autistic students in schools
3. Identify strategies that may support an autistic student with anxiety as described within a case example.



# In the chat, let us know ...

1. What are mental health topics that you would like more information on?
2. For the topics you identify, how would you want information presented?



# Thank you!

Southeast MHTTC:

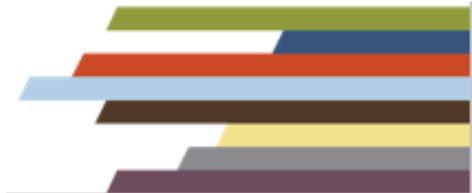
<https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/southeast-mhttc/home>

Contact:

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## Evaluation

Please complete the following survey:

<https://ttc-gpra.org/P?s=777246>

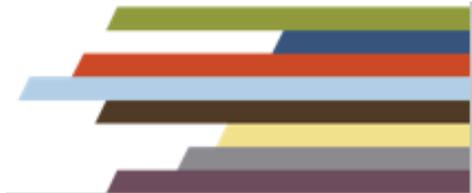
*If you have additional questions or suggestions please email us at*

[schoolmh@southeastmhttc.org](mailto:schoolmh@southeastmhttc.org)



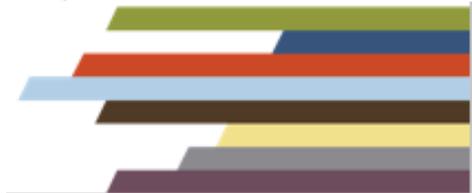
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